

# ARS □ CSREES □ ERS □ NASS

## *Bulletin*

**Title:** AFM Voice Mail Policy and Procedures

**Number:** 99-001

**Date:** 03/25/99 **Expiration:** 03/24/00

**Originating Office:** Deputy Administrator, Administrative and Financial Management/ARS

**Distribution:** All AFM Employees - Washington, DC and Greenbelt, Maryland

This Bulletin establishes policy and procedures for using voice mail in AFM and provides information on accountability for the use of voice mail. The technical aspects of using the voice mail system are covered in the manual provided by VoiceCom.

## 1. Introduction

Voice mail is a critical resource AFM will use to further our mission and provide quality service to our customers. Voice mail will be implemented throughout AFM, as described below, and appropriate training will be provided for all AFM employees on the voice mail system and on customer service principles.

## 2. Statement of Policy

AFM supports the use of voice mail in all of our organizational units to provide customers and the public with easy access to AFM employees who can provide information about the REE mission area agencies and their programs, AFM and our programs, and any other legitimate, mission-related activity. In addition, AFM supports voice mail for authorized personal business as outlined under Departmental Regulation 3300-1, "Telecommunications." AFM voice mail policy is predicated on using voice mail to enhance productivity and customer service.

The AFM customer service hours are 8:00 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. In order to ensure the highest quality customer service during these hours, the following will be adhered to:

- All main (published) telephone lines for division-level offices and above will be answered by a person. These main telephone lines will not have voice mailboxes. However, the telephone lines can be call forwarded to another telephone line as long as the telephone calls will be answered by a person. For after hours service, answering machines may be used to receive telephone calls.
- GS-14s and above will publish the main office telephone number. All other employees will publish their individual telephone numbers.
- All main (published) telephone lines for branch-level offices and below will normally be answered by a person. However, these main telephone lines will have voice mailboxes and telephone calls can be answered by these voice mailboxes for short, reasonable periods of time. Telephone calls/voice mail messages will be returned as soon as possible, but no later than the same day or the morning of the next day in the event of a late afternoon call. It is also acceptable to call forward these telephone lines to another telephone line as long as the telephone calls will be answered by a person.
- All published employee telephone lines will have voice mailboxes and telephone

calls can be answered by these voice mailboxes as deemed appropriate by the employee. Telephone calls/voice mail messages will be returned as soon as possible.

### **3. Summary of Responsibilities**

#### **AFM employees will:**

- ! Inform co-workers of their whereabouts and accessibility during the day.
- ! Use voice mail as an effective communication tool to share and receive information with customers and the public in a timely fashion.
- ! Attend mandatory training on customer service principles, voice mail policies, and system functions.
- ! Answer all telephone calls by identifying their division and their name (e.g., Human Resources Division, this is...).
- ! Follow the voice mailbox greeting guidelines as outlined below.
- ! Ensure that designated alternates to which callers are referred are in the office that day and will be returning telephone calls.
- ! Not use voice mail to avoid incoming calls.
- ! Inform family members how to contact them in emergency situations.

#### **AFM supervisors will:**

- ! Ensure employees receive appropriate training on the use of voice mail and customer service principles.
- ! Manage the use of voice mail within their area of responsibility to ensure established policies and procedures are followed.
- ! Respond to feedback received on the use of voice mail by employees under their direction and share this information with their employees. If the feedback is negative, the supervisor will be responsible for contacting the complainant for

further discussion and possible resolution.

## 4. Voice Mailbox Greeting Guidelines

Voice mailbox greetings will be updated everyday to include your daily schedule (exceptions: travel, leave, training, etc.). Voice mailbox greetings will include the following information:

- ! Current day's date or, in the exceptions listed above, the last date the greeting was created.
- ! Voice mailbox owner's name or, in the case of main telephone line voice mailboxes, the office's official organizational title.
- ! Status of the voice mailbox owner's whereabouts for that day or period of days (e.g., in/out of the office, in meetings for what period of time, on travel, sick). Branch-level secretaries' voice mail message will include the status of their supervisor.
- ! Encourage the callers to provide a substantive message so you may respond appropriately and avoid "playing telephone tag."
- ! An explanation of when the caller can expect the call returned (e.g., after your meeting, certain time of day, certain period of time).
- ! A greeting ending that indicates if they would like to speak to someone else, they can call (alternate) at the following telephone number.

## 5. Accountability

### Employees

All AFM employees will be held accountable for proper use of voice mail through existing performance standards related to customer service and communications. Instances where employees do or do not follow established policies and procedures will be taken into consideration in the total performance appraisal process. Feedback (positive/negative) from AFM customers will be used in this consideration. Employees failing to use established policies and procedures will be counseled accordingly by the supervisor.

## **Supervisors**

Supervisors will solicit and receive feedback (positive/negative) from AFM customers for use in assessing their employees' performance in meeting the overall customer service requirements outlined in the existing performance standards. Supervisors will address feedback with each employee and, if the feedback is negative, the supervisor will contact the complainant for further discussion and possible resolution.

## **6. Soliciting AFM Customer Feedback**

In order to monitor the use of voice mail within AFM, a customer service E-mail box and telephone hotline will be established to gather both positive and negative feedback from AFM customers.

Data gathered will be used to 1) provide positive and negative feedback to supervisors and employees; 2) address customer issues; and 3) identify systemic problems and trends where additional training and guidance may be needed.

*-Sd-*

W. G. HORNER  
Deputy Administrator  
Administrative and Financial Management